



MEREDITH
D'AMBROSIO

*Beware
Of
Spring!*

- 1 **I FALL IN LOVE TOO EASILY** 2:10
Jule Styne, Sammy Cahn
- 2 **CAULIFLOWER SOUL** 2:15
Meredith d'Ambrosio
- 3 **FOOLS FALL IN LOVE** 4:40
Irving Berlin
- 4 **BEWARE OF SPRING** 5:16
Meredith d'Ambrosio
- 5 **GET LOST** 2:36
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- 6 **GET OUT OF TOWN** 2:36
Cole Porter
- 7 **I HAVEN'T GOT ANYTHING BETTER TO DO** 6:04
Pokriss & Vance
- 8 **MOON DREAMS** 5:10
Chummy McGregor, Johnny Mercer
- 9 **ESTATE (THAT SUMMER)** 5:32
Bruno Martini, Susannah McCorkle
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Kevin Gibbs, Meredith d'Ambrosio
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- 15 **AFTER AWHILE** 3:43
Jennie Smith, Steve Allen
- 16 **I HAD THE CRAZIEST DREAM** 2:55
Harry Warren, Mack Gordon
- 17 **I CAN'T WAIT TO TELL YOU** 2:56
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- 18 **NO ONE KNOWS** 5:10
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MEREDITH D'AMBROSIO

VOCALS AND PIANO (ON TRACKS 3, 11 & 14)

EDDIE HIGGINS

PIANO (EXCEPT ON TRACKS 3, 11 & 14)

JEFF HIRSHFIELD

DRUMS

GEORGE MRAZ

BASS

Special thanks to Judy Bell of TRO

RECORDED SEPTEMBER 13 & 14, 1994 AT SEAR SOUND, NEW YORK CITY

ENGINEER: A. T. MICHAEL MacDONALD

COVER WATERCOLOR "AUVERS-SUR-OISE" BY MEREDITH D'AMBROSIO

ALBUM DESIGN: CHRIS DRUKKER

PRODUCED BY FRANÇOIS ZALACAIN

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SSC 1069D



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Sunnyside

To judge from the liner notes to her previous recordings, I am a typical Meredith d'Ambrosio fan. It was love at first sound when I was introduced to this magical singer/pianist, which in my case happened to be on her second album, *Another Time*, reissued on Sunnyside 1017D. d'Ambrosio's impeccable musicianship, which in that case was totally exposed in a solo recital; her equally exceptional choice of material, with just a hint (one tune) that this singer was also a gifted composer; and, most important, her absolute emotional empathy, which took d'Ambrosio straight to the core of a lyric's meaning, to mine it deeply without overstating a point or treading musical water, all bore the mark of one of jazz's great vocal artists.

She has been eliciting such reactions for quite a while, to judge from John Coltrane's 1963 invitation for d'Ambrosio to join his group for a Japanese tour. Not as an opening act, but as a featured singer with the Coltrane quartet! With a young daughter to care for, d'Ambrosio had no choice but to turn Coltrane down. So the world waited, for another 15 years, until d'Ambrosio found her way to a recording studio. The album is *Lost in His Arms*, reissued on Sunnyside 1018D, and she insists that she was tricked into making it by an invitation to just see how her voice would sound in a studio. The intervening period was spent working as a solo act, with eyes focused on other artistic prizes. "To me," she will admit, "music was just a means to support my career as a painter."

No doubt her visual acuity, displayed in the paintings that grace most of her album covers, reinforces her musical perceptiveness. The house that d'Ambrosio and her husband, pianist Eddie Higgins, inhabit on Cape Cod during several months of the year is filled with her watercolors - a few of the remaining unsold eggshell mosaics (a technique that d'Ambrosio invented, then abandoned as too time consuming) and more recent views of home, family and travels. Road trips with d'Ambrosio must be quite an adventure, because she is constantly stopping to sketch or photograph scenes that will later be recreated in paint. Watercolors of French country roads, Scottish castles and the like were evidence of her recent journeys and the impressions they left.

Those not fortunate enough to view a collection of d'Ambrosio's paintings receive a gallery of impressions each time she releases a new collection of songs. A key to her success, of course, is her phonebook voice - give her a page of your local directory to sing and she'll turn it into poetry; but d'Ambrosio doesn't sing the phonebook. She makes the most astute choices of material to be heard in any vocal idiom, thanks to her ability to hear songs completely. While she clearly loves a well-turned melodic line or harmonic detail, lyrical content is most important. d'Ambrosio likes to tell a story when she sings, and likes the story to have resonance in her life and the life of her listeners. That is why she chose Susannah McCorkle's lyrics from among several English-language versions of the Italian classic *Estate*. McCorkle, not content to merely indulge in seasonal wordplay, created a vignette that sounded true to life.

There are many such scenarios available, and d'Ambrosio knows thousands. She claimed a repertoire of 2000 tunes on an early album, and has been adding to it ever since. Among them in the current batch are such gems as *Fools Fall in Love*, one of Irving Berlin's lesser-known works that d'Ambrosio remembers from Lucy Reed's 1955 encounter with Bill Evans, and *Through a Long and Sleepless Night*, an Alfred Newman movie opus

that (to this listener's knowledge) has only been covered by Bobby Darin. She included *After Awhile* because she is fond of Steve Allen's writing, and had previously recorded his *Everybody Knows* on *The Cove*, Sunnyside 1028D - although this time Allen only supplied the lyrics and the music is by Jennie Smith. And *Moon Dreams* was a longtime favorite from the classic Miles Davis *Birth of the Cool* sessions, although the Davis Nonet version did not include Johnny Mercer's lyrics.

d'Ambrosio also has the rare knack of being able to write them as good as she picks them. Her words grace pianist Kevin Gibbs' melody on *Summer of My Life* (the pair also collaborated on two tunes from d'Ambrosio's *Shadowland*, Sunnyside 1060D), and she is responsible for both words and music on the title track, *Give It Time* and *No One Knows*. As a melody writer, d'Ambrosio shows great range, from the sophisticated turns of *Give It Time* to the more melancholy simplicity of *Beware of Spring*. She is concerned that she got a lyric wrong when she recorded the last number, although the emotional intensity of the performance could not be more accurate.

The reason d'Ambrosio claims for her errant lyric reading on *Beware of Spring* is the panic she feels when accompanying herself on piano. While her playing is always perfectly in place, completely attuned to the mood each song evokes, one can understand her reluctance to play when she can call upon her husband, one of the great jazz pianists. Higgins and d'Ambrosio were married in 1988, and their musical partnership has made the great thing that was d'Ambrosio's singing even better. This is revealed time and again in the present collection, although nowhere better than on the four "paraphrase songs" that d'Ambrosio has crafted from the standards *I Fall in Love Too Easily*, *Get Out of Town*, *Dearly Beloved* and *I Had the Craziest Dream*. On these tracks, where Higgins can anticipate the surprising turns in d'Ambrosio's melodic variations, there are all kinds of felicitous accompanying touches, as well as indelible piano solos.

The paraphrase songs (the term was coined by Bob Dorough to describe what d'Ambrosio was doing), like the eggshell mosaics, are the singer's invention. They expand upon the meaning of familiar material through written variations in which music and words are developed in tandem, rather than the more familiar vocalese practice of fitting lyrics to preexisting solos. This album offers the richest serving of paraphrases yet, with so much content in d'Ambrosio's melodic lines that it is hard to believe they did not originate with an improviser of Bill Evans' stature.

d'Ambrosio explains the title *Cauliflower Soul*, which she uses for her paraphrase of *I Fall in Love Too Easily*, as a term she coined to describe the emotional battering she received from the vicissitudes of life. Yet it is her gift to have surmounted these various challenges while still holding on to their deeper meanings, which she translates into such stunning words and sounds. She and Higgins have formed a perfect partnership, enhanced here by drummer Jeff Hirshfield and bassist George Mraz, who plays some of his most melodic recorded solos throughout the date. Like the rest of her loyal fans, I would argue that Meredith d'Ambrosio has never made a bad recording; for my money, though, *Beware of Spring!* may be her best.

Bob Blumenthal

MEREDITH D'AMBROSIO BEWARE OF SPRING!

MADE IN FRANCE



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